DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 685 SP 028 454

TITLE	Teacher Certification. ERIC Digest 11.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	86
CONTRACT	400-83-0022
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *State Standards; *Teacher Certification; *Teacher Qualifications
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digest

ABSTRACT

Teacher certification is the education system's process for assuring that public school teachers possess minimum qualifications. Each state determines its own certification standards. Increased mobility among teachers suggests that teacher candidates should have information about general requirements for certification and where to locate particular state requirements. This digest provides information on the purpose of certification, types of certification, certification requirements, how to obtain information about requirements, and prospects for change in requirements. References are included. (JD)

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ED277685

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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST 11

1986

Teacher Certification

Teacher certification is the education system's process for assuring that public school teachers possess minimum qualifications. Each state determines its own certification standards. Increased mobility among teachers suggests that teacher candidates should have information about general requirements for certification and where to locate particular state requirements. This digest provides information on certification purpose and types, how to obtain information about requirements, and prospects for change in requirements.

The Purpose of Certification

Certification is a process by which the state evaluates the credentials of prospective teachers to ensure that they meet the professional standards set by the state education agency. Certification ratifies the quality of teachers' competence in subject area, educational methodology, teaching skills, and potential classroom management ability (Roth and Mastain 1984). Closely linked to certification is state program approval or institutional approval, which is the state's process of evaluating schools, colleges, and departments of education. The purpose of such approval is to ensure a common curriculum framework and professional standards so that the state's teacher education programs produce graduates who meet the state's certification requirements.

Some states have developed their own standards for the approval of individual teacher preparation programs; however, the most commonly used standards are those which have been developed by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) and have been in the process of almost constant revision for the past 35 years.

The Interstate Reciprocity Compact, initiated in 1969, provides for graduates of approved teacher education programs in one participating state to be granted a certificate in another participating state. Of the 37 states that have passed reciprocity legislation, 33 state superintendents have signed legal contracts which allow the granting of certificates and facilitate the movement of teachers across state lines.

Many states have certification procedures and/or criteria mandated by state legislatures and/or set by state boards of education, particularly since 1980. Certification is a legal process. Criteria for certification, however, have professional origins, and the state department of education's teacher certification division carries out the process (Roth and Mastain 1984). Some writers have made a distinction between certification and licensure. If certification validates a person's skills as a teacher and licensure provides for a process which permits teaching (Shulman and Sykes 1986), then "licensing" appropriately describes the process in most states because it is a review of a paper application to verify that teacher preparatory minimums have been met. The terminology consistently used, however, is "certification" or "credentialing" (see Roth and Mastain 1984; Burks 1986; AACTE 1986).

Certification requirements differ nationwide. NASDTEC publishes the *Manual on Certification and Preparation of Educational Personnel in the United States* (Roth and Mastain 1984), which describes each state's requirements.

Types of Teacher Certification

Most states require that teacher candidates have graduated from a regionally accredited higher education institution and provide automatic certification for a candidate who has completed an approved teacher education program. Some states will also grant certificates to applicants who have completed teacher preparation programs approved by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In addition, many states require that the candidates achieve satisfactory scores on state-required tests for beginning teachers. All states also have a "credit count" process for qualifying for a certificate. An analysis of the college transcript is completed to verify that the specific coursework required is met. Provisional or temporary certificates are issued while the applicant is completing the requirements for full certification.

All states have separate certification for teachers, administrators, and other school professionals such as librarians, vocational educators, reading specialists, and counselors. Most offer certification specific to subject area and grade level, although the range of categorized grade levels often varies among the states. Elementary school may be defined as K-6, 1-8, or 1-6; middle school is listed variously as 4-8, 6-9, or 7-8; high school ranges from 6-12 to 10-12. Initial certification duration also varies, from a one- to three-year provisional certificate in several states to a ten-year professional or permanent certificate in Iowa. Provisional certificate renewal may require satisfactory completion of an induction program for beginning teachers; renewal of other certificates may require proof of recent college credit in specific content areas or of specific duration. The initial certificate's lifetime is not indicative of type: Kentucky calls its ten-year initial certificate "provisional" (Burks 1986).

Most states issue emergency credentials to teachers who do not meet the state's minimum requirements for a regular credential (Roth and Mastain 1984). Some states allow alternative teacher certification for people who have not completed college or university teacher education programs. For example, local school districts in California can prepare teacher trainees who receive credentials from the state just as graduates from institutional programs do (*ERIC Digest* 1 1986). Increasingly, states also offer provisional or probationary certificates for teacher graduates who participate in sponsored induction or internship programs.

Certification Requirements

An examination of certification requirements listed by NASDTEC (Roth and Mastain 1984; AACTE 1986; and Burks 1986) yields the following information. All states require the teacher applicant to have completed a bachelor's degree and a state-approved teacher education program or the "credit count" coursework requirements. Some states specify a minimum number of credit hours to be earned in certain academic subjects. Most require a recommendation from the applicant's undergraduate institution and notarized copies of college transcripts and of any previously issued teacher certificates. California requires fingerprints. New Jersey requires an "Oath of Allegiance." West Virginia and Hawaii require no application fees; California requires more than $50 in fees. Requirements for certification renewal also differ among the states and may include satisfactory completion of a beginning teacher induction program, a specified number of graduate credit hours, or specified advanced coursework.

Twenty-six states require examinations for certification. The National Teachers' Examination (NTE) is used most often. Twelve states have mandated examination requirements for certification that must be implemented no later than 1989. Only four states have no examination requirement for entry into or exit from a teacher education program (AACTE 1986).

How to Obtain Current Certification Requirements

The most reliable teacher certification information source for any state is the teacher credentialing office of the state's education department. Forty-six states refer certification inquiries to their teacher certification offices, located in the Department of Education or Public Instruction. California and Oregon have teacher licensing commissions that are separate from the state department of education. Minnesota issues certification information from the Personnel Licensing and Placement Office. In Illinois, the State Board of Education, Certification Placement Section, offers the information.

In addition to the NASDTEC Manual, another reliable source of state certification information is *Requirements for Certification*, an annual publication of Chicago University Press (Burks 1986).

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How Are Certification Requirements Expected to Develop?

Teacher certification has become increasingly important with the increase in public concern for teaching quality and with the recognition that teachers, like the rest of society, have become more mobile. The goal of NCATE and other national teacher education organizations is to institute teacher preparation programs in all states which will produce nationally acceptable candidates for teacher certification (NCATE 1985).

The latest proposal for improving teacher certification processes comes from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. Its much-publicized report, "A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century" (1986) includes a national certification plan. A national certification board, supported and assisted by the teaching profession, would define and control standards for the professional practice of teaching (Shulman and Sykes 1986). National certification is proposed as a voluntary procedure that would professionally enhance teachers' credentials by adding to, but not replacing, state certification. Shulman and Sykes provide general content and format proposals for evaluation procedures to be used in a national certification process.

"Tomorrow's Teachers," the recent Holmes Group report (1986), also expresses concern for the prevailing diversity of certification procedures nationwide. This group of education deans from research universities proposes the creation of nationally standardized examinations to be required for all beginning teachers.

Both the Holmes and Carnegie reports consider national control of the certification process as the best way to achieve standardized teacher certification. National certification also would provide a forum for the increased participation by professional education organizations in establishing standards and certification procedures. For example, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) accepted the national certification concept at its 1986 annual meeting. AACTE is studying the proposed changes in certification requirements and how they will affect teacher education programs. The group intends to issue a report in February 1987. The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association also endorsed the national certification board concept at their 1986 conventions. The presidents of these two teachers' unions were named in September 1986 to Carnegie's national-board planning group. A national certification board is expected to be operating by summer 1987 (*Education Week* 10 September 1986).

References

Many of the following references—those identified with an EJ or ED number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and order information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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OERI
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-83-0022. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department.

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